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processing method, an information center, and a data delivery system are capable of judging reliably whether digital signals such as music data signals recorded on a storage medium have been legally purchased by a customer from a legitimate vendor, so that only when the digital signals are judged to be legitimately purchased data, will a new service be offered to the customer. --

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend claims 1-26 by rewriting same to read as follows:

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-- 1. (Amended) A digital signal processing apparatus comprising:

transmitting means for transmitting inquiry information to an information center over a communication line, said inquiry information being generated based on digital data that have been recorded on a storage medium loaded by a customer after undergoing a predetermined low bit rate coding process;

receiving means for receiving a result of an inquiry conducted by said information center based on said inquiry information;

discriminating means for judging, based on said result of said inquiry, whether said digital data recorded on said storage medium are legitimately purchased data; and

controlling means which, when said discriminating means judges said digital data to be legitimately purchased data,

executes a process to offer an additional service to said customer.

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--2. (Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means by one of copying and moving said digital data from said storage medium to another storage medium.

--3. (Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said digital data recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a predetermined version into digital data having undergone a low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a more advanced version, before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

--4. (Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means restoring said digital data having undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process onto said storage medium.

--5. (Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus

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according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said digital data recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process of a predetermined bit rate into digital data having undergone a low bit rate coding process of a different bit rate before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

--6. (Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises furnishing said customer, free of charge, with a product related to a producing party who produces said digital data purchased legitimately by said customer from said information center.

--7. (Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising inputting means for inputting identification information for identifying said digital data that have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and that are subject to said inquiry,

wherein said identification information input through said inputting means is transmitted to said information center over said communication line.

--8. (Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said information center

comprises:

receiving means for receiving said inquiry information and said identification information for identifying said digital data that have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and that are subject to said inquiry transmitted from said digital signal processing apparatus;

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retrieving means for retrieving said digital data subject to said inquiry from said inquiry from said information center based on said identification information for identifying said digital data;

reference inquiry information generating means for generating reference inquiry information based on said digital data retrieved by said retrieving means;

comparing means for comparing said reference inquiry information generated by said reference inquiry information received by said receiving means;

inquiry result generating means for generating an inquiry result based on a result of the comparison by said comparing means; and

means for transmitting said inquiry result generated by said inquiry result generating means.

--9. (Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said reference inquiry information generating means subjects part of said digital data retrieved by said retrieving means to low bit rate coding process executed by a software encoder, the coded data part

being compared with said inquiry information by said comparing means.

--10. (Amended) The digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising charging means for processing charges;

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wherein, when said discriminating means judges that said digital data recorded on said storage medium are legitimately purchased data, said charging means charges one of nothing and a reduced amount on said customer for said additional service offered to said customer.

--11. (Amended) A digital signal processing method comprising the steps of:

transmitting identification information and inquiry information to an information center over a communication line, said identification information identifying digital data that have been recorded on a storage medium loaded by a customer into a terminal device after undergoing a predetermined low bit rate coding process and that are to be transmitted from said terminal device, said inquiry information being generated based on said digital data;

receiving a result of an inquiry conducted by said information;

judging, based on said result of said inquiry, whether said digital data recorded on said storage medium are legitimately purchased data; and

when said digital data are judged to be legitimately purchased data, executing a process of offering an additional service to said customer.

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--12. (Amended) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises one of copying and moving said digital data from said storage medium to another storage medium.

--13. (Amended) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises converting said digital data recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a predetermined version into digital data having undergone a low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a predetermined version, before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

--14. (Amended) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises restoring said digital data having undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process onto said storage medium.

--15. (Amended) The digital signal processing method

according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises converting said digital data recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate into digital data having undergone a low bit rate coding process of a different bit rate, before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

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--16. (Amended) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises furnishing said customer, free of charge, with a product related to a producing party who produced said digital data purchased legitimately by said customer from said information center.

--17. (Amended) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, further comprising the step of inputting said identification information for identifying said digital data that have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and that are subject to said inquiry,

wherein said identification information input in said inputting step is transmitted to said information center over said communication line.

--18. (Amended) A digital signal processing method comprising the steps of:

receiving identification information and inquiry

information from a terminal device over a communication line, said identification information identifying digital data that have undergone a predetermined low bit rate coding process and that are subject to an inquiry, said inquiry information being generated by said terminal device based on said digital data;

retrieving said digital data subject to said inquiry from a digital data storage of said information center based on said identification information for identifying said digital data;

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generating reference inquiry information based on retrieved digital data;

comparing generated reference inquiry information with received inquiry information;

generating an inquiry result based on a result of the step of comparing and;

transmitting the inquiry result.

--19. (Amended) An information center for judging whether digital data that have been recorded on a storage medium loaded into a terminal device and that have undergone a predetermined low bit rate coding process are legitimately purchased data, said information center comprising:

receiving means for receiving identification information and inquiry information from said terminal device over a communication line, said identification information identifying said digital data that have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and that are subject

to an inquiry, said inquiry information being generated by said terminal device based on said digital data;

retrieving means for retrieving said digital data subject to said inquiry from a digital data storage of said information center base on said identification information for identifying said digital data;

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reference inquiry information generating means for generating reference inquiry information based on retrieved digital data;

comparing means for comparing generated reference inquiry information with received inquiry information;

inquiry result generating means for generating an inquiry result based on a comparison by said comprising means; and

transmitting means which, when the comparison reveals a match between the generated reference inquiry information and the received inquiry information, transmits predetermined service information to said terminal device.

--20. (Amended) A data delivery system having an information center that stores digital data having undergone a predetermined low bit rate coding process, and a terminal device connected to said information center by a communication line that records digital data delivered from said information center onto a storage medium loaded by a customer,

wherein said terminal device comprises:

transmitting means for transmitting inquiry information and identification information to said information center over

said communication line, said inquiry information being generated based on said digital data that have been recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process and that are subject to an inquiry, said identification information identifying said digital data;

receiving means for receiving a result of said inquiry conducted by said information center based on said inquiry information;

discriminating means for judging, based on said result of said inquiry, whether said digital data recorded on said storage medium are legitimately purchased data; and

controlling means which, when said digital data are judged to be legitimately purchased data, executes a process to offer an additional service to said customer; and

wherein said information center comprises:

receiving means for retrieving means for receiving said identification information and said inquiry information from said terminal device, said identification information identifying said digital data that have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and that are subject to said inquiry;

retrieving means for retrieving said digital data subject to said inquiry from the digital data storage of said information center based on said identification information for identifying digital data;

reference inquiry information generating means for generating reference inquiry information based on said digital

data retrieved by said retrieving means;

comparing means for comparing said reference inquiry information generated by said reference inquiry information generating means with said inquiry information received by said receiving means;

inquiry result generating means for generating an inquiry result based on a comparison result by said comparison means; and

transmitting means for transmitting said inquiry result generated by said inquiry result generating means.

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--21. (Amended) The data delivery system according to claim 20, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means performing one of copying and moving said digital data from said storage medium to another storage medium.

--22. (Amended) The data delivery system according to claim 20, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said digital data recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a first predetermined version into digital data having undergone a low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a second predetermined version, before replacing the unconverted digital data with the converted digital data on said storage medium.

--23. (Amended) The data delivery system according to claim 20, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means restoring said digital data having undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process onto said storage medium.

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--24. (Amended) The data delivery system according to claim 20, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said digital data recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process of a predetermined bit rate into digital data having undergone a low bit rate coding process of a different bit rate, before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

--25. (Amended) The data delivery system according to claim 20, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises furnishing said customer, free of charge, with a product related to a producing party who produces said digital data purchased legitimately by said customer from said information center.

--26. (Amended) The data delivery system according to claim 20, wherein said terminal device further comprises charging means for processing charges; and

wherein, when said discriminating means judges that said